

Message Text

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ACTION EB-11

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 8337

DEPT PASS COMMERCE AND EXIMBANK

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ETRN LE

SUBJ: CIVAIR - TMA STUDIES FEASIBILITY OF AIR FREIGHTING ALL
LEBANESE EXPORTS TO SURROUNDING COUNTRIES

REF: BEIRUT 8321

BEGIN SUMMARY: TMA CHAIRMAN ABU-HAIDAR HAS OUTLINED
STUDY PRESENTLY BEING CONDUCTED TO DETERMINE ECONOMIC
FEASIBILITY OF AIR FREIGHTING ALL LEBANESE EXPORTS TO
SURROUNDING COUNTRIES, THUS FREEING LEBANON FROM
CONSEQUENCES OF SYRIAN BORDER CLOSINGS. IN DETERMINING
COST FACTORS, STUDY PRUDENTLY ASSUMES THAT SYRIAN AIR
SPACE, AS WELL AS SURFACE ROUTES, WOULD ALSO BE CLOSED.
THOUGH INTENDED TO BE CONFIDENTIAL, ASPECTS OF STUDY
HAVE BEEN LEAKED TO PRESS. SHOULD SHIFT FROM SURFACE
TRANSPORT TO AIR TRANSPORT PROVE ECONOMICALLY FEASIBLE,
THIS WOULD BE BOON TO LEBANON'S POLITICAL STABILITY.
HOWEVER, MANY PITFALLS WOULD STAND IN WAY TOWARD IMPLE-
MENTATION OF PLAN AS ENVISAGED. AS A SIDE EFFECT, IM-
PLEMENTATION COULD INVOLVE PURCHASE OF FOUR 747'S. END
SUMMARY.

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1. DURING JULY 11 MEETING BETWEEN MUNIR ABU-HAIDAR, TMA

CHAIRMAN, EMBASSY ECONOMIC COUNSELOR AND RCAA, TMA
CHAIRMAN INDICATED THE BOEING COMPANY PRESENTLY
HAS STUDY-TEAM ASSIGNED TO TMA HEADQUARTERS EXAMINING
FEASIBILITY AND ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF TENTATIVELY PROJECTED
LONG-TERM ALL-CARGO AIRLIFT LEBANON'S TOTAL EXPORTS AND
IMPORTS TO/FROM MIDDLE EAST POINTS EAST AND SOUTH OF
BEIRUT THAT NORMALLY, IN SURFACE MODE, REQUIRED TRANSIT
SYRIAN TERRITORY (CLOSED TO LEBANESE TRANSIT TRAFFIC SINCE
MAY 8). CONCEPT, IF ACTIVATED, WOULD PERMIT LEBANON TO
MAINTAIN MUCH MORE INDEPENDENT STANCE IN PRESENTLY ULTRA-
SENSITIVE POLITICAL AND COMMERCIAL RELATIONS WITH SYRIA.
ABU-HAIDAR INDICATES TENTATIVE PLAN APPEARS INVOLVE FOUR
BOEING 747F FREIGHTERS, EACH OPERATING AT MINIMUM TWELVE-
HOUR AVERAGE DAILY UTILIZATION. CONCURRENT STUDIES HAVE
BEEN AWARDED BY TMA TO BEIRUT-BASED CONSULTANTS TO STUDY
AND EVALUATE TOTAL EXPORT/IMPORT PATTERN OF LEBANON'S
FOREIGN TRADE BY COMMODITY, BY VALUE, BY ORIGIN-DES-
TINATION, AND SEASONAL FLUCTUATION IN VOLUME BY COMMODITY
CATEGORY.

2. TO ASSURE MAXIMUM TRAFFIC VOLUMES AND ECONOMIC VIABILITY,
PARTICULARLY DURING THOSE PERIODS WHEN SYRIAN BORDER IS
OPEN TO LEBANESE SURFACE TRANSIT-TRADE, TMA WOULD EXPECT
TO RECEIVE FIRM FIVE-YEAR GUARANTEE, IN ADVANCE, FROM ALL
LEBANESE SHIPPERS AND CONSIGNEES UTILIZING AIRLIFT. IN
TURN, TMA WOULD GRANT EACH SHIPPER OR CONSIGNEE FIRM
FIVE-YEAR GUARANTEE ON STABILITY AND LEVEL RATES CHARGED
FOR AIRLIFT REGARDLESS OF WHETHER SYRIAN BORDER CLOSED
OR OPEN TO LEBANESE TRANSIT AND COMMERCIAL SURFACE MOVEMENTS.
ANTICIPATING THAT SUCH AIRLIFT WOULD TRIGGER SYRIAN BAN
ON LEBANESE OVERFLIGHTS OF SYRIAN TERRITORY, BOEING STUDY
ENVISAGES INCLUDING COST PENALTIES OF AVOIDING SYRIAN
AIRSPACE ON AIRLIFT. ABU-HAIDAR
BELIEVES THAT ON SERVICES TO JIDDA AND YEMEN, TMA WOULD
DETOUR VIA OVERFLIGHTS EGYPTIAN TERRITORY. ON SERVICES TO
DHAHRAN, RIYADH AND THE ARABIAN GULF, AS WELL AS IRAQ AND
IRAN, THE DETOUR WOULD BE VIA FLIGHTS OVER TURKISH, IRAQI
AND IRANIAN AIRSPACE. STUDY IS TENTATIVELY CONSIDERING
INTERMODAL CONCEPT USING THREE MAJOR DISTRIBUTION POINTS,
JIDDA, BAGHDAD AND DUBAI, WHEREIN THE AIRLIFT WOULD BE
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TO AND FROM BEIRUT AND EACH OF THESE POINTS AND TRANSPORT
TO AND FROM ONWARD POINTS BY SURFACE MODE.

3. ABU-HAIDAR HAS INDICATED THAT PLAN HAS BEEN OUTLINED
TO LEADING LEBANESE POLITICAL FIGURES, INCLUDING PRESIDENT
FRANJIEH, AND THAT RESPONSE HAS BEEN HIGHLY FAVORABLE.
INCLUDING SPARES AND GROUND EQUIPMENT, ABU-HAIDAR ESTIMATES
CAPITAL EXPENDITURES FOR THE FOUR 747F AIRCRAFT AT \$160

MILLION. HE DOES NOT BELIEVE GOL GUARANTEES WOULD BE FORTHCOMING TO COVER LOAN FOR THIS AMOUNT BECAUSE PRECEDENT-SETTING GUARANTEE WOULD HAVE TO BE APPROVED BY LEBANESE PARLIAMENT, PROCESS WHICH DUBIOUS IN RESULT AND CERTAINLY TIME-CONSUMING AND INTRICATE IN STEERING THROUGH LEBANESE POLITICAL MAIZES.

4. ABU-HAIDAR EMPHASIZES THAT THIS REQUIREMENT IS SEPARATE AND APART FROM FLEET PLAN ANALYSIS NOW BEING PREPARED BY R. DIXON SPEAS, THE BOEING COMPANY AND THE DOUGLAS AIRCRAFT COMPANY (REFTEL 8321) TO MEET TMA'S NORMAL SCHEDULED-SERVICE REQUIREMENTS THROUGH 1980 AND WHICH REPRESENTS CHOICE BETWEEN THE BOEING 747-200F/300F/400F AND THE MCDONNELL DOUGLAS DC-10-30/40AF. ABU-HAIDAR'S PLAN LEAKED BY UNKNOWN SOURCES LEBANESE PRESS LAST WEEK, SOME ELEMENTS OF WHICH ERRONEOUSLY REPORTED GOL HAD DECLINED ISSUE GOVERNMENTAL GUARANTEE TO FACILITATE FINANCING NECESSARY AIRCRAFT FOR AIRLIFT. ACCORDING ABU-HAIDAR, GOL HAS NEVER BEEN OFFICIALLY APPROACHED ON MATTER. ABU-HAIDAR ALSO INDICATES THAT ASAD NASR, MEA GENERAL MANAGER, HAS INDICATED INTEREST OF HIS AIRLINE IN PARTICIPATING IN AIRLIFT, BUT IT WOULD APPEAR ABU-HAIDAR BELIEVES PROJECTED AIRLIFT IS AN ALL-CARGO REQUIREMENT WHICH SHOULD BE HANDLED BY TMA.

COMMENT: IF PLAN PROVES TO BE ECONOMICALLY FEASIBLE, IT COULD CONTRIBUTE CONSIDERABLY TO MAINTAINING INTERNAL STABILITY BY FREEING COUNTRY FROM TYPE OF BORDER BLACKMAIL CURRENTLY PRACTICED BY SYRIA. IMPLEMENTATION HOWEVER WOULD BE SUBJECT TO MANY PITFALLS, INCLUDING TMA-MEA RIVALRY, PRESSURES FROM TRUCKING INDUSTRY, ETC., NOT TO MENTION INTERNAL ELEMENTS WITHIN LEBANON NOT AT ALL INTERESTED IN REDUCING THE COUNTRY'S DEPENDENCE ON ITS NEIGHBOR.

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